



Elkhead Reservoir Enlargement Project February 2004 Project Update

With the start of a new year, the Colorado River Water Conservation District would like to take a moment to fill you in on what the coming year holds for plans to enlarge Elkhead Reservoir. This reservoir enlargement project involves a number of complex issues and processes that have been moving at a glacial pace, however, changes are occurring and we'd like to keep you abreast of what they are.

As you may know, a group of partners including the Recovery Program for the Endangered Fishes of the Upper Colorado River, the City of Craig, the State of Colorado, the owners of the Craig Station power plant and the Colorado River Water Conservation District are working on plans to nearly double the size of Elkhead Reservoir. Of the 11,750 acre-feet of new water storage that will be created, 5,000 acre-feet will be used for Yampa River flows for endangered fishes and 4,750 acre-feet will be available for sale to water users. The remaining 2,000 acre-feet may be used for fish flows in some years or leased for human use.

Enlargement Project Timetable

We anticipate being able to solicit bids from construction companies this year for work to begin in 2005. At present, no bulldozers are waiting in the wings, but it appears that the Elkhead Reservoir expansion project may become a reality within a year. A series of agreements and permits still need to be completed prior to project commencement and are controlling the timetable for construction. Start of construction at the reservoir will be preceded by very public announcements, and we will keep all parties informed as to when construction is slated to begin.

Non-native Fish Management

Control of non-native fish species has been a very contentious issue in the Yampa River Basin. Part of the reason for expanding Elkhead Reservoir is to provide additional water to recover endangered native fish species whose endangered status could have required local water users to curtail some present uses of water, or prevent future water development, in order to comply with federal Endangered Species Act requirements. One of the components of the efforts to recover these species is to control non-native fish in the Yampa River that are hampering recovery efforts.

Construction of a screening mechanisms for the reservoir's spillway and outlet works is under consideration. Screens would allow populations of non-native northern pike, smallmouth bass and other introduced sportfish to continue to inhabit Elkhead reservoir without risk of escapement into waters where recovery efforts are taking place. The Colorado Division of Wildlife is developing plans to manage the popular sport fishery at Elkhead Reservoir without negative impacts to endangered species.

Recreation and Elkhead

The expansion project at Elkhead offers a tremendous opportunity to upgrade the popular recreational facilities at the site. Camping, boating, swimming and trail facilities will be built, expanded and/ or upgraded by the time the reservoir reopens after expansion.

Because of safety concerns for the public, recreational facilities at the reservoir will be closed while construction is taking place. While the reservoir will be drawn to permit construction work, a conservation pool will remain in the reservoir to preserve the fishery. The conservation pool will not be open for public fishing or other recreation during the construction process, which is expected to take about two years to complete.

County Roads

Moffat County Road 28 currently crosses the dam crest. Because the dam area will be under construction and the road therefore not available, local traffic will be detoured when possible across the old county road which crossed the Elkhead Creek valley before the reservoir was built. The stretch of Moffat County Road 29 on the west side of the reservoir in “Greenwood Cove” will be reconstructed to include a wider curve and a parking area for “walk-in” reservoir users.

Negotiations

A number of agreements still must be reached prior to commencing expansion. The Colorado River Water Conservation District is spearheading efforts to bring these issues to resolution. Among them are:

- Agreements with adjacent landowners whose property will be affected by expansion.
- A permit must be issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as required by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.
- The reservoir’s current owners, the City of Craig and the Yampa Participants (owners of Craig Station power plant) must give final consent for expansion.
- Project funding arrangements must be finalized between all involved parties.
- Agreement of operation of reservoir and recreation facilities after enlargement must be reached.

Contacts

This overview of recent progress on the expansion project may not answer all of your concerns. The following contacts can provide you with additional information on areas not covered in this update.

Colorado River Water Conservation District

- Ray Tenney, P.E. Senior Water Resources Engineer (970) 945-8522 rtenney@crwcd.org
- Dan Birch, P.E. Water Projects Development Manager (970) 871-1529 dbirch@crwcd.org
- CRWCD website - www.crwcd.org

For fishery management issues:

Colorado Division of Wildlife

- Susan Werner, Area Manager, Steamboat Springs, (970) 871-2842, Susan.Werner@state.co.us
- Dan Prenzlowl, Area Manager, Meeker, (970) 878-6061, dan.prenzlowl@state.co.us

Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

- Gerry Roehm, Instream Flow Coordinator, (303) 969-7322 x272, gerry_roehm@fws.gov